



THE KATHMANDU POST

WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOUR

Nepal's largest selling English daily
Printed simultaneously in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Bharatpur and Nepalgunj

Vol XXXII No. 300 | 8 pages | Rs.5
Sunday, December 22, 2024 | 07-09-2081

26.0°C -5.0°C
Janakpur Jumla



POST PHOTO: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Janakpur Bolts celebrate after defeating Sudurpaschim Royals in the final of the Nepal Premier League T20 cricket tournament at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday. (Report on Pg 7)

TODAY

○ NATIONAL

Tribhuvan University's provision for teachers to study abroad is being misused. Any teacher who has taught for five years after permanent posting is eligible to get paid study leave for three to five years. Pg 3

○ OPINION

Abhi Subedi dwells on roles of three women—Mandakini, Balakrishna Sama's wife; Sushila Koirala, BP Koirala's wife; and Manu Kumari Thapa, Lain Singh Bangdel's wife—in their husband's success. Pg 4

○ MONEY

Small investments, easy work, and good benefits made beekeeping lucrative for many Palpa villagers. What threatens the occupation's sustainability though is that these beekeepers hardly receive any government help. Pg 5

○ WORLD

Kyiv staged a major drone attack on the Russian city of Kazan, 1,000 kilometres from the frontier, as Moscow's troops captured a new frontline village in eastern Ukraine nearly three years into the invasion. Pg 6

Syrian Kurdish groups on the back foot as power balance shifts

Turkey seems determined to exploit the changing equation in Syria to the fullest.



People carry freshly baked bread at a market in the Syrian capital Damascus on Saturday.

○ REUTERS

QAMISHLI, SYRIA/BEIRUT/ANKARA, DEC 21

With hostile Turkish-backed groups mobilising against them in Syria's north, and Damascus ruled by a group friendly to Ankara, Syria's main Kurdish factions are on the back foot as they seek to preserve political gains carved out during 13 years of war.

Part of a stateless ethnic group straddling Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Armenia and Syria, Kurds have so far been among the few winners of the Syrian

conflict, controlling nearly a quarter of the country and leading a powerful armed group that is a key US ally in countering Islamic State.

But the power balance has tilted against them since the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) swept into Damascus this month, toppling President Bashar al-Assad, two analysts and a senior Western diplomat told Reuters.

The seismic change in Syria is expected to yield deeper Turkish sway just as a change of US administration

>> Continued on page 2

is raising questions over how long Washington will keep backing the country's Kurdish-led forces.

For Turkey, the Kurdish factions represent a national security threat. Ankara views them as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been waging an insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984 and is deemed a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and other powers.

The Syrian Kurdish groups "are in deep, deep trouble", said Aron Lund, a fellow at Century International, a US-based think tank.

"The balance has shifted fundamentally in Syria to the advantage of Turkey-backed or Turkey-aligned factions, and Turkey seems determined to exploit this to the fullest."

The shift has been reflected in renewed fighting for control of the north, where Turkey-backed armed groups known as the Syrian National Army (SNA) have made military advances against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Fanar al-Kait, a senior official in the Kurdish-led regional administration, told Reuters that the ouster of Assad, whose Arab nationalist Baath Party oppressed Kurds for decades, presented a chance to stitch the fragmented country back together.

>> Continued on page 2

Milantha's bolts help Janakpur clinch inaugural NPL title

The opener's 87 off 49 propels the Bolts to a successful pursuit of a daunting 185 target, securing thrilling victory.

○ SPORTS BUREAU

KATHMANDU, DEC 21

Janakpur Bolts clinched the title of the inaugural edition of the Nepal Premier League T20 cricket tournament after they defeated Sudurpaschim Royals by five wickets in a high-octane final at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday.

United States wicketkeeper-batter Lahiru Milantha scored a scintillating 87 runs off 49 balls, helping Janakpur successfully chase down a challenging target of 185 runs with four balls to spare. Milantha's explosive innings featured nine boundaries and four sixes.

Milantha gave Janakpur a solid start with a 73-run opening stand with Asif Sheikh.

Asif made a brisk 33 runs off 19 balls before falling to Saif Zaib in the 6.6 overs.

Mohammad Mohsin followed soon after, bowled by Ishan Pandey in the 9.6 overs.

Milantha was dropped in the first ball of the 12th over by Dipendra Singh Airee and it proved costly as the American capitalised by stitching together another vital 61-run partnership with Harsh Thaker.

Scott Kuggelijn finally caught-and-bowled Milantha in the 15.1 overs but Thaker's unbeaten 30 off 24 ensured Janakpur crossed the finish line.

"Absolutely amazing," player of the match Milantha said after the match. "I am so happy... I cannot describe it. These guys are amazing. Credit goes to them. Both teams played very good cricket. But we came on top."

Earlier, Sudurpaschim opted to bat first and posted an imposing 184-9, thanks to a commanding 117-run partnership of openers Zaib and Binod Bhandari.

Sudurpaschim's Saif Zaib and Binod Bhandari partnered for 117 runs in a lost cause.

Zaib cracked 69 runs off 43 balls, laced with eight fours and two sixes, while Bhandari contributed a steady 41 runs off 31 balls.

However, the middle-order collapse stymied their momentum. Kishore Mahato (3-25) triggered the slump by dismissing Zaib in the 12th over, followed by Lalit Rajbanshi removing Bhandari. Mohsin then inflicted further damage with the key wickets of Harmeet Singh (14), Dipendra Singh Airee (9) and Asif Sheikh (1).

Kuggelijn added 13 off 10 before falling to Mahato, who then dismissed Naresh Budayair (8).

>> Continued on page 7



Nepal's safest bank. Five times in a row.

सिपले सम्मान, सिपको सम्मान

SKILL HERO Award 2025



APPLY

NOMINATE



SKILL HERO

By Glocal Pvt. Ltd.

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 27, 2024

www.skill.glocalafterschool.com

Organized by



Partners

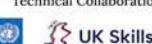


Honda

Empowered by



Technical Collaboration



UK Skills Partnership

Endorsed by



Official Hotel Partner



Kānātपुर

Strategic Partners



Embassy of India

Kathmandu, Nepal

Australian Government

Media Partner

Outreach Partner



NATIONAL

DISTRICT DIGEST

Teacher and student die falling into gorge while shooting TikTok video



TEHRATHUM: A teacher and a student lost their lives on Saturday afternoon after falling into the gorge of the Khorung Khola in Menchhayayem Rural Municipality, Tehrathum, while making a TikTok video. Deputy Superintendent of police Chinimaya Tamang identified the deceased as Rabina Rajbanshi, a teacher at the local Gaukhuri Secondary School, and Sushmita Bhattarai, approximately a 12-year-old studying in the seventh grade at the same school. The two had gone swimming in the Khorung stream, located south of the school, along with other friends during their weekend break. While attempting to create a TikTok video by the river, they fell into the gorge. Both died on the spot, confirmed Yadav Bahadur Khapung, chairperson of the Menchhayayem municipality. Police have recovered the bodies from the gorge and transported them to the riverbank. Further investigations are ongoing.

Robbers murder house owner in Mahottari

DHANUSA: An elderly man was murdered by a group of robbers at Sada of Manarashisawa Municipality-4 in Mahottari district on Saturday morning. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Santul Prasad Jaiswar, the robbers killed Sushil Jha, 70, and looted his house in the wee hours on Saturday. A group of some five to seven robbers barged into Jha's house and looted cash and valuables. The assailants strangled the victim to death as he retaliated against the robbery. They whisked away Rs80,000 cash and some gold jewelry. Search is on to nab the robbers involved in the crime, said police.

Recommendation letter from ward mandatory to get married

PARI: The ward 5 of Bardaghat Municipality in Nawalparasi West has introduced a provision for bride and bridegroom to compulsorily receive the ward's recommendation for wedding. The provision has been enforced to control child marriage, ward chairperson Bimala Gurung said. The provision has it that the bride and bridegroom will be eligible for marriage only after getting a recommendation letter mentioning their ages from the ward office. The ward was declared a child-friendly ward around one-and-a-half months ago.

Deadline for Jamune-Pokhara road widening extended by a year, 35 percent progress so far

Repeated deadline extensions have affected local residents and tourism in Pokhara, the lake city that is one of Nepal's prime tourist destinations.

SAMJHANA RASAILI

TANAHUN, DEC 21

The government has extended the deadline of the western section of Anbukhaireni-Pokhara road expansion project for the second time.

The Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and Transport extended the deadline of the Jamune-Pokhara section of the road project by December 30 next year.

"The contractor moved forward with its process to extend the project deadline stating that the Covid pandemic, demolition of various roadside structures, cutting down trees and removing pipes of drinking water projects delayed the work," said Saujanya Nepal, engineer and information officer of the western section of Anbukhaireni-Pokhara road expansion project. "We also notified the ministry accordingly. The ministry has approved the deadline extension proposal."

Work to widen the 80km-long Anbukhaireni-Pokhara section of the Prithvi Highway to four lanes is underway after dividing the road stretch into two sections—Anbukhaireni-Jamune (41km) and Jamune-Pokhara (39km).

The Project Directorate under the Department of Roads signed a contract for the construction of the western section of Jamune-Pokhara with the Chinese company Yanhui Kaiyun Highway and Bridge Construction at a cost of Rs7.4 billion in May, 2021.

The construction company had until mid-September this year to complete the project and the deadline was extended to mid-November for the first time.

"The contractor has expressed its



Blacktopping work in progress at the Dumre-Jamune section of the Prithvi Highway earlier this month.

POST PHOTO: SAMJHANA RASAILI

commitment to complete the project within the extended deadline this time," Nepal said. According to him, the Jamune-Pokhara road section has around 35 percent physical progress and around 24 percent financial progress as of now.

"Of the total 39 kilometres of the Jamune-Pokhara section, as much as 23.91 kilometres has been blacktopped in the first phase," he added.

A total of 12 bridges—four major bridges and eight small ones—should be constructed in the Jamune-Pokhara section. Construction of nine different bridges has been completed while work on three major bridges over the Seti river, Bijayapur and Kotre streams is underway.

Likewise, road expansion work in

the eastern section of Anbukhaireni-Jamune is also slow. "The road expansion work along the Anbukhaireni-Jamune has been delayed," said Prakash Chandra Bhandari, chief of eastern section of Anbukhaireni-Jamune road expansion project.

"The contractor complained that work has been disrupted over the delay in removing pipelines of several drinking water projects, shifting electricity lines and clearing the roadside physical infrastructures mainly in the marketplaces."

Communication Construction, a Chinese company, had signed the contract for the construction of the eastern section of the Anbukhaireni-Jamune road section in January, 2021 for Rs6.21 billion. According to the

agreement, the contractor was supposed to complete the road project by May, 2024. The project was not completed within the set deadline. So the project agreement was extended to February 13, 2025.

According to Bhandari, the Anbukhaireni-Jamune road section has around 71 percent physical progress and around 53 percent financial progress as of now.

"It is quite difficult to complete the work within the extended deadline. It seems that the project deadline should be extended in the Dumre, Damauli and Bimalnagar areas," said Bhandari.

According to him, around 31 of a total 41 kilometres in the Anbukhaireni-Jamune section has

been blacktopped in four lanes while six kilometres of road has been blacktopped in two lanes. Construction of 13 bridges in the eastern section has been completed so far while three major bridges are under construction.

Prithvi Highway links two major cities—Kathmandu and Pokhara. It was built with Chinese assistance and was completed in 1974. One of the busiest highways in the country, it faces frequent traffic jams. The government decided to widen the existing two-lane highway to four lanes with loan assistance from the Asian Development Bank.

The delay in road-widening work along the Anbukhaireni-Pokhara section of Prithvi Highway has affected the local residents. Mainly the locals including traders on the roadside are greatly affected. Tourism entrepreneurs say that the delayed road construction work has greatly affected tourism in Pokhara, the country's major tourist destination.

An important section of the Prithvi Highway and lifeline of the Gandaki Province, the Muglin-Pokhara road section is 88-km long, out of which the Anbukhaireni-Pokhara section covers 80 km.

Around 72km of the road section of the highway falls in Tanahun district. The road widening work along the Muglin-Nagdhunga section is also underway but like elsewhere, it is also moving at a snail's pace.

However, the design for the 8-km Anbukhaireni-Muglin section has yet to be finalised. The road project said that preparations are on to change the road alignment along the section due to the presence of the powerhouse of the Marsyangdi Hydropower Project.

New leadership in Damascus showing warmth towards Ankara

>> Continued from page 1

He said the administration is ready for dialogue with Turkey, but the conflict in the north showed Ankara had "very bad intentions".

"This will certainly push the region towards ... a new conflict," he added.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday he expected foreign states would withdraw support for Kurdish fighters following Assad's toppling, as Ankara seeks to isolate the People's Protection Units (YPG), the Kurdish militia that spearheaded the SDF alliance.

Responding to questions from Reuters, a Turkish official said the root cause of the conflict is "not Turkey's view towards the region; it is that the PKK/YPG is a terrorist organisation".

"The PKK/YPG elements must lay down their arms and leave Syria," the official said.

SDF commander Mazloum Abdi, in a Reuters interview on Thursday, acknowledged the presence of PKK fighters in Syria for the first time, saying they had helped battle Islamic State and

would return home in the event a total ceasefire was agreed with Turkey. He denied any organisational ties with the PKK.

Feminism and Islamism

Meanwhile, in Damascus, the new leadership is showing warmth towards Ankara and indicating it wants to bring all Syria back under central authority—a potential challenge to the decentralisation Kurds favour.

While Turkey provides direct backing to the SNA, it along with other states deems HTS a terrorist group because of its al Qaeda past.

Despite this, Ankara is believed to have significantly sway over the group. A senior Western diplomat said: "The Turks can clearly influence them more than anyone else".

HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa told a Turkish newspaper that Assad's ouster was "not only the victory of the Syrian people, but also the Turkish people".

The Turkish official said HTS was not and never had been under Ankara's control, calling it a structure "we were communicating with due to circumstances" and adding many Western states were also doing so.

Syrian Kurdish groups led by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the affiliated YPG militia took control of much of the north after the uprising against Assad began in 2011. They established their own administration, while insisting their aim was autonomy, not independence.

Their politics, emphasising socialism and feminism, differ starkly from HTS' Islamism.

Their area grew as US-led forces partnered with the SDF in the campaign against Islamic State, capturing Arab-majority areas.

The Turkey-backed SNA groups stepped up their campaign against the SDF as Assad was being toppled, seizing the city of Manbij on December 9.

Washington brokered a ceasefire, but the SDF

has said Turkey and its allies have not abided by it, and a Turkish defence ministry official said there was no such deal.

US support for the SDF has been a point of tension with its NATO ally, Turkey. Washington views the SDF as a key partner in countering Islamic State, which Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned will try to use this period to re-establish capabilities in Syria. The SDF is still guarding tens of thousands of detainees linked to the militant group.

Turkish Defence Minister Yasar Guler said last weekend that Turkey saw no sign of an Islamic State resurgence in Syria. On Friday, Turkey's foreign minister, Hakan Fidan, told his German counterpart during talks in Ankara that alternatives needed to be found for the management of camps and prisons where the detainees are being held.

Separately, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf said on Friday that Washington was working with Ankara and the SDF to find "a managed transition in terms of SDF's role in that part of the country."

President Joe Biden's administration has said that US troops will stay on in Syria, but President-elect Donald Trump could remove them when he takes office on January 20.

Letter to Trump

During his first administration, Trump attempted to pull out of Syria but faced pressure at home and from US allies.

In a December 17 letter to Trump, reviewed by Reuters, top Syrian Kurdish official Ilham Ahmed said Turkey was preparing to invade the northeast before he takes office.

Turkey's plan "threatens to undo years of progress in securing stability and fighting terrorism", she wrote. "We believe you have the power to prevent this catastrophe."

Trump's transition team did not immediately

respond to a request for comment.

Trump said on December 16 that Turkey will "hold the key" to what happens in Syria but has not announced his plans for US forces stationed there.

"The Kurds are in an unenviable position," said Joshua Landis, a Syria expert at the University of Oklahoma. "Once Damascus consolidates its power, it will move on the region. The US can't remain there forever."

HTS leader Sharaa told British broadcaster the BBC that Kurds were "part of our people" and "there should be no division of Syria", adding arms should be entirely in the state's hands.

Sharaa acknowledged one of Turkey's main concerns—the presence of non-Syrian Kurdish fighters in Syria—and said: "We do not accept that Syrian lands threaten and destabilize Turkey or other places."

He pledged to work through dialogue and negotiations to find "a peaceful formula to solve the problem," saying he believed initial contacts had been established "between the Kurds in northeastern Syria or the SDF organisation".

Kait, the Kurdish official, said his administration wanted "a democratic Syria, a decentralized Syria, a Syria that represents all Syrians of all sects, religions and ethnicities," describing these as red lines. The SDF would be "a nucleus of the coming Syrian army," he added.

SDF commander Abdi, in his Reuters interview, confirmed that contact had been established with HTS to avoid clashes between their forces but said Ankara would try to drive a wedge between Damascus and the Kurdish-led administration.

Still, he said there was strong support from international parties, including the US-led coalition, for the SDF joining "the new political phase" in Damascus, calling it "a great opportunity". "We are preparing, after a total ceasefire between us and between Turkey and the affiliated factions, to join this phase," he said.

Koirala, Thapa 'yet to discuss' general convention plans

>> Continued from page 1

"In order to complete the local conventions on time, we sent active membership application forms to the 165 constituencies as well as party chapters abroad but no constituency has completed its task," a Congress office bearer said. "This could push back the general convention."

The Congress has formed a task force to look into issues related to the general convention.

The general convention is likely to be deferred by a year due to a number of political and technical issues, said Congress lawmaker Ramhari Khatiwada. As per the Congress charter, the party can defer the general convention by a year citing unavoidable circumstances. According to party leaders, there is a big churn happening inside the Congress, with old factions and groups either dismantled or taking new shapes in light of the upcoming general convention.

For instance, former foreign minister NP Saud, a longtime aide to Deuba, joined the Koirala faction.

More leaders of the Deuba camp have also joined Koirala or Thapa factions. With Deuba out of the race, there is now a competition between Koirala and Thapa to pull leaders from the Deuba camp into



Shekhar Koirala has said he would build the Nepali Congress 'suitable to the times'.

their folds, said a Congress central committee member.

Though Deuba has kept his cards close to his chest, many Congress leaders believe General Secretary Thapa is now making inroads into the Deuba camp. The two have been getting closer after CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli became the prime minister in July.

Deuba has so far refrained from fully supporting Thapa, Koirala or any other candidate," said Khatiwada, chair of the federal parliament's State Affairs Committee. There is also a chance

of Deuba rooting for Dr Shashanka Koirala as next party president.

"I will build a Nepali Congress suitable to the times we live in after the 15th general convention," Shekhar Koirala said in Dhangadhi on Saturday. "In order to strengthen the party, I am ready to take over its leadership."

Koirala said the focus is on holding the general convention by December 2025 as stipulated in the charter, and there should be "no ifs and buts about this".

Soon after he lost the party presidency in 2021, Koirala started cam-

paigning for the next convention, travelling across the country, meeting party cadres and most often playing the role of the party's "opposition" leader.

Congress central working committee member Ajaya Babu Shiwakoti, who is close to Thapa, said Thapa is busy handling the mechanism formed by the ruling Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML to make the government's work effective, as well as with the party's internal works, "which is why he appears slow in preparing for the next convention".

"But [Thapa] is constantly in touch with party leaders and cadres across the country," said Shiwakoti. "Also, there have been no serious talks between Koirala and Thapa on who will contest the post of party president."

Thapa contested and won the general secretary position from the Koirala camp at the last convention. While Koirala lost the top post, Thapa won with a wide margin of votes. There is a section of leaders in the Koirala-Thapa camp who still believe the two leaders should come together and contest the elections in consensus so that the camp can win a maximum number of seats in the Congress central working committee and other bodies of the party.

JAYAKAR

Wednesday Oct.4, 1989
(Navaratri)

Wednesday Dec.22, 1999
(Purnima)

Twenty five years have passed
and yet your memories still fill our hearts.
You have been our guiding light throughout
to remain strong, humane and
to serve in ways that we can.

Dad, Mom, Malika,
Mayanka-Anubhav
Mahika, Sahansh & Sarvaraj

Will Kolkata become the next New Delhi in the coming five years?

● ROUSHAN CHATTERJEE

KOLKATA, DEC 21

Recently, Delhi's air pollution grabbed the attention of the country when its Air Quality Index (AQI) reached the mark of 700 in some parts of the region. Schools were shut down, masks—once worn during the COVID-19 pandemic, again became common, and air pollution became a heated topic of discussion across various platforms. However, now—when the AQI slightly dropped to below 250, which is still 'very unhealthy,' the urgency has disappeared, and people have resumed their daily lives.

This raises questions like: can this ignorance lead to a more vulnerable situation, and are other cities 'safe' from this advancing global concern?

The issue of air pollution is rising in Kolkata. While the city's air quality has not reached the extreme levels like Delhi, it's still on an alarming rise. Considering this situation, can a city like Kolkata (where the AQI is already between 150-200, 'very unhealthy') be safe, or may it face a similar fate to that of Delhi in the near future?

Factors contributing to air pollution

There are certain components that contribute to the rising air pollution during winter. "During the winter season, there's a change in the direction of wind speed. In summer or monsoon season, the wind direction in our country is from southeast to northwest, but in winter, it flows from northwest to southeast. In this way, wind flows from the upper Indo-Gangetic plain from Punjab, Haryana, followed by Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand to West Bengal. Also, the wind speed is faster in summer or monsoon compared to winter," an official of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board (WBPCB) shared with *The Statesman*. He claimed that West Bengal, being at the receiving end of the upper Indo-Gangetic plain, results in all the pollutants reaching West Bengal and accumulating there. "More than 40 percent of the pollutants in West Bengal are from other regions. This is the primary reason for worsening air quality in West Bengal."

Another natural factor is that during the winter, the winds are usually heavy. "In summers, when the temperature rises, heat radiates from the ground, causing the nearest air from the ground to become warmer. This warmer air is lighter and rises up in the atmosphere, and along with it, the dust and pollutants also rise up. Since the wind speed is higher in summer, it blows these pollutants away," he explained.

While in winter, due to the low temperatures, the wind is heavier and remains closer to the ground. The wind speed is also slow, so the dust generated by vehicular emission, burning of coal, and smoke released by the industries doesn't rise up in the atmosphere and remains at the ground level, where people breathe in it. As a result, people suffer from breathing problems, and those with chronic bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are impacted adversely.

Other than natural elements, anthropogenic activities add to this condition. "We know about the primary reasons like vehicular emission and the toxic gases released by the industries. However, there are some other factors that we don't consider. For instance, during November, dry leaves fall to the ground, and the local

sweeper collects and burns them. Many times, plastic waste thrown in the ground gets mixed with these leaves and burns as well. This is harmful as the gases released by burning dry leaves are dangerous, and when plastic is added to it, it releases dioxin gas, which is highly carcinogenic and a primary cause of cancer," he stated. He also highlighted factors like the burning of coal while cooking. Many slums and roadside eateries, like local food and tea stalls, don't have LPG and rather use coal for cooking.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

The National Clean Air Programme is a long-term initiative to improve the air quality in India. Launched in 2019 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), the initiative aims to achieve reductions up to 40 per cent or achievement of National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Particulate Matter10 (PM 10) concentrations by 2025-26 (reduce PM 10 concentrations by 40 percent from the 2017-18 period by 2025-26). It includes 131 non-attainment cities, one of them being Kolkata, across 24 States and Union Territories of the nation.

Why is Kolkata not Delhi?

In terms of pollution, Kolkata's geographic location plays a crucial role when compared to Delhi. West Bengal is at the end of the upper Indo-Gangetic plain and beside the Bay of Bengal. Delhi is a landlocked city, and



its neighbouring regions experience stubble burning during winter. Stubble burning is the practice of intentionally burning stubble after the grains are harvested. It is illegal in India, but because of the weak enforcement, it is still practiced in parts of Punjab. Stubble burning is one of the key contributors to the rising air pollution.

The toxic gases released from the burning of stubble reach Delhi, and as Delhi's temperatures are lower compared to Kolkata, the wind there is heavier. The heavy winds accumulate the pollutants and contribute to the extreme level of air pollution observed in Delhi. However, Kolkata is far from states like Punjab, and being beside the Bay of Bengal, the temperature is milder than in Delhi. "Hence, Kolkata can never have an extreme level of air pollution like Delhi. Moreover, compared to 2019, the AQI of Kolkata has reduced with the implementation of work under NCAP. However, this is still not sufficient as we have the target of reducing 40 percent of PM 10 concentration of 2017-18 levels by 2025-26," claimed the official.

Steps taken by WBPCB

The WBPCB has undertaken several measures to curb pollution in West Bengal under NCAP. Some of the primary measures include providing smokeless chulha, where coals and woods can be burned for cooking. However, it will not release any gas. WBPCB has provided 10,000 smokeless chulha to people living in slums and to roadside stalls in Kolkata, Howrah,

and Barrackpore, reducing open biomass burning. "Through satellite monitoring, we identify areas where biomass burning occurs and inform the district administration or local police station to take immediate action," the official explained.

EV-integrated dust suppressant water sprinkling systems are another approach to combat dust pollution. Usually, when vehicles move on the road, they cause resuspension of dust-dust particles rise up, and when a car passes by, it again settles back down. For that reason, WBPCB is using water sprinklers combined with dust suppression agents on the road. This initiative is being carried out through e-vehicle because using diesel vehicles will only add to the pollution, defeating the purpose of the initiative.

An ambitious project adopted by WBPCB is the creation of a Green Bioshield. "More than 40 per cent of the pollutants in West Bengal are from other regions. Considering the factor, we have decided to build a natural green cover by growing trees along the 780km stretch bordering Bihar and Jharkhand."

This initiative is aimed at creating a natural barrier against the pollutants carried by the north-west winds. This cover is done in three layers. "So far, 30 km has been covered and will require 7-8 years for completion." Efforts are also being made to combat industrial pollution. "Air pollution control devices have been installed in industries like thermal stations, the cement industry, and the steel industry. We are also decarbonising government vehicles to reduce emissions and increase efficiency," the official affirmed.

Expert's view

Biswajit Roy Chowdhury, member of the State Wildlife Board and Secretary of the National Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS), said vehicular emission, particularly carbon monoxide is deadly for human lungs and a primary cause for the increased incidence of cancer and pulmonary diseases in Kolkata and West Bengal.

"States with industries should focus on green energy. Like in Sweden, a new factory is going to produce green steel."

Chowdhury also highlighted the challenges while transitioning. "We always emphasise the use of e-vehicles. However, due to its high cost, it is often inaccessible to the common man."

Role of the common man

While both the officials of WBPCB and the Secretary of NEWS have suggested measures that we, as common men, can undertake. First, we must reduce the usage of fossil fuels and adopt cleaner technologies. When we see dry leaves being burned, we should make people aware of the health hazards it can cause. Even during a morning walk, many of us stand beside roadside tea stalls to drink tea. As a result, we fail to get the benefit of a morning walk because we end up inhaling the toxic gases released from the burning of coal used in these stalls. So, we should be aware and make others aware as well to combat this heightened global issue.

While Kolkata is not likely to face a severe crisis like Delhi, the city's current air quality is still very unhealthy and a pressing concern. The air we breathe is a shared resource, and its protection is a shared responsibility. Kolkata may not become the next Delhi, but the time to act is now.

—The Statesman

Misuse of TU's 'study abroad' provision prompts concern

The country's oldest varsity doesn't have a proper record of its teachers who have gone abroad on paid study leaves. Officials say they are now collating data.

● POST REPORT

KATHMANDU, DEC 21

Around four dozen Tribhuvan University teachers who went abroad on study leave have not returned, flouting the university law.

Following the publication of a media report that said the opportunity to study abroad was being misused, the TU had sought data from its different departments. The Centre for Investigative Journalism reported that the country's oldest varsity doesn't have a proper record of its teachers who have gone abroad on paid 'study leaves' and whether they have returned after completing their study abroad.

On December 8, the university's Coordination Division had directed all of its constituent colleges, institutes and agencies concerned to report about such teachers. "As of now, we have received the information that at least 42 teaching staff who have travelled abroad for study haven't returned, flouting existing laws," Deepak Tiwari, the Division's acting chief, told the Post. "It will take some days for us to prepare the detailed report."

The university allows its teachers—mainly the lecturers and assistant professors—to study abroad for their capability enhancement. Any teacher who has taught for five years after permanent posting is eligible to get paid study leave for three to five years.

While lecturers themselves find the universities of their choice for the study, there are also the opportunities allocated for the teachers from the TU.



Most of such study abroad opportunities the Nepali teachers get are scholarships, mainly for the MPhil or PhD programme.

The university's 'Teacher Staff Service Rules-1994' has specific provisions about the eligibility for such opportunities. Its clause 30 states that teachers who have used their study leave for five years must return to service and serve for at least five years. One using three years of leave has to be in the classrooms for the same period after the completion of their study abroad.

The teachers wanting to get paid leave for study abroad must sign a bond with the coordination division in line with the TU staff rules. They also need to present a witness while signing the bond based on the service rules.

The rule's clause 84 states that if a teacher doesn't attend the office for 90

days, the university can sack them. However, there are minimal cases where such teachers have been sacked.

So much so that, in several cases, the teachers who have been staying abroad have been receiving the salary from the university. The university administration says they will fully implement the law once all the data of the defiant teachers is available.

The report of the University Grants Commission states that as many as 8,122 teachers are associated with the oldest university. Of them 689 are professors, 2,199 are associate professors, 4,124 lectures, 984 assistant lectures and 126 are instructors.

Among universities, the TU receives the highest budget from the government. Of the total Rs17.46 billion for the university education, the oldest and the largest university's receives Rs12.26 billion.

Government of Nepal
Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation
Alternative Energy Promotion Centre
Tahachal, Kathmandu, Bagmati Province, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-4598013/4598014
Email: info@aepc.gov.np Website: www.aepc.gov.np

Request for Expression of Interest (EOI)

Date of Notice Publication: 22 December 2024

EoI Number : AEPC/BES/EoI/2081/82-01

1. Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) is implementing Renewable Energy Programmes and intends to apply a portion of these funds to eligible payments under the contract for which this Expression of Interest is invited for National Consulting Services.
2. AEPC hereby invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from eligible consulting firms ("consultant") to provide the consulting service: Monitoring and Assessment of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) registered Biogas Plants.
3. Interested eligible consulting firms may obtain further information and EOI documents free of cost at the office of AEPC as mentioned above address during office hours on or before **12:00 Noon on 6 January 2025** or may visit e-GP system of PPMO: www.bolpatra.gov.np/egg or may visit the client's website: www.aepc.gov.np.
4. Separate Expressions of interest need to be submitted for each task.
5. Consultants may associate with other consultants to enhance their qualifications.
6. Expressions of interest shall be delivered online through e-GP system of PPMO: www.bolpatra.gov.np/egg on or before **12:00 Noon on 6 January 2025**.
7. In case the last date of obtaining and submission of the EOI documents happens to be a holiday, the next working day will be deemed as the due date but the time will be the same as stipulated.
8. EOI will be assessed based on Qualification [40%], Experience [45%], and Capacity [15%] of consulting firm and key personnel. Based on evaluation of EOI, only shortlisted firms will be invited to submit detailed Technical and Financial proposal through a Request for Proposal (RFP).
9. Minimum score to pass the EOI is: **70 (Seventy)**.
10. Other details are provided in uploaded EoI document.

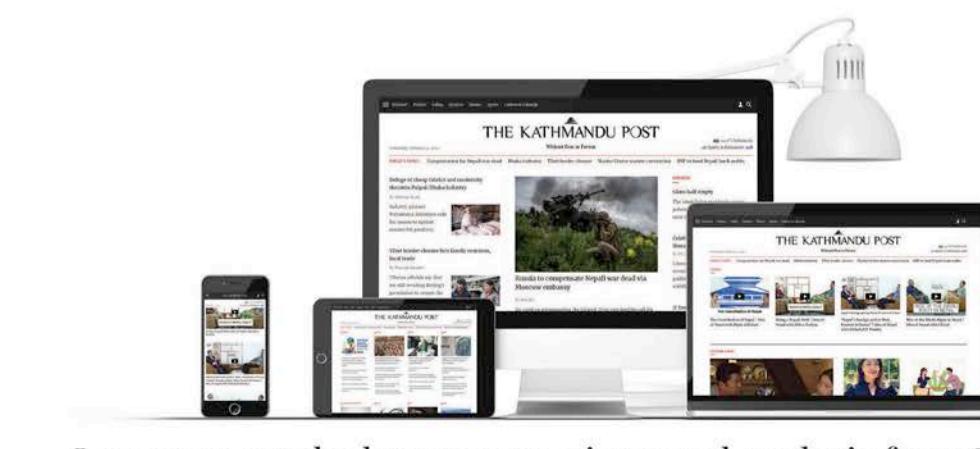
www.kathmandupost.com



THE KATHMANDU POST

Know Nepal with the country's most **trusted** English **news portal**.

Politics. Economy. Sports. Health. Culture. Fashion. Food. Interviews. Videos. Puzzles. And much more...



Log on to get the latest news, views and analysis from Nepal.

OPINION

Guiding youth

They need special attention and constant encouragement to stay away from social ills.

AMIN VALLIANI



Pakistan is currently the world's fifth most populous country. The majority of the population consists of youth between the ages of 18 to 30. The youth are our future, our most valuable assets; in their hands will soon lie the reins of the nation. However, we see that they are facing tremendous problems in finding a direction in life. They need guidance, help, and role models.

It is the parents' prime responsibility to guide their children on the way to success. It is necessary for parents to inculcate sound ethics in the younger generation so that they refrain from waywardness.

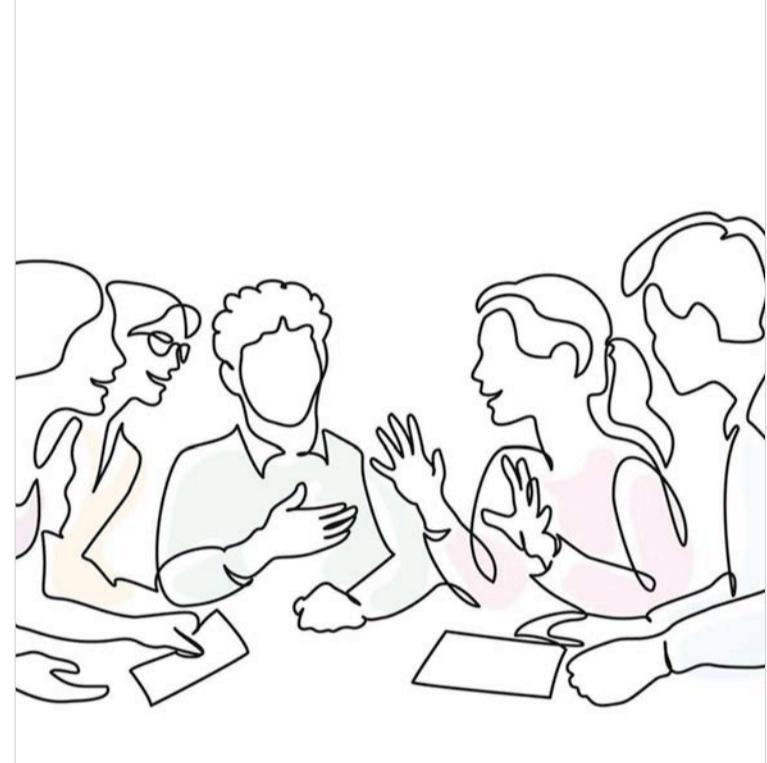
Adolescence is a particularly important phase of life. It is a unique stage for laying the foundations for the future edifice of life.

stant encouragement to stay away from social evils.

Normally, youths seem to be ambitious. Therefore, they should be encouraged to explore new opportunities and keep pace with the changing world. Parents may try to convince them that they should not rely on shortcuts for fame and success but work hard and embrace challenges so they may achieve success through struggle. In any field they choose, they should not simply chase grades but acquire real knowledge. Here, parents should try to instill in them a strong sense of commitment.

Of late, the use of social media amongst the youth has increased manifold. Consequently, this has increased parents' responsibilities significantly. There is a lot of fake content on various social media platforms. It is, therefore, the parents' responsibility to protect the youth from the adverse effects of fake content. They have to balance screen time with physical activities to promote a healthy digital lifestyle. Monitoring should be coupled with open conversations and setting limits.

The youth are required to understand the nature of life. Life is tough and competitive; it is not a bed of roses, nor is it full of thorns. It is full of ups and downs. It's like an endless ocean. We are sailing in a boat and want to touch the shore.



Adolescents experience rapid physical and cognitive growth. This affects how they feel, think, share, make decisions, and interact with the world around them.

Though every young person is different from the other, and each builds his or her life according to their own individual experiences, they all share some basic traits. For example, they want to be attractive, energetic and passionate in their peer circle. They adopt new fashions and hairstyles, flaunt new clothes, and dream about achieving certain goals. With each passing day, they become more and more independent about the things they like, how to get around and where to go, how to spend time and how to spend money.

The youth are required to understand the nature of life.

As they become more independent, there come some changes in family routines and relationships, as well as their friendships. It is a period where they develop their own perceptions about the world. This creates a gap between parents' thinking and that of their offspring. Many youths resort to throwing tantrums over trivial matters. In many cases, parents lose their influence over youths, but it is necessary that they keep an eye on their behaviour and try to reduce the gap between them.

It is also a precarious stage where youths can be misled and adopt negative habits like smoking, or take to drug addiction. Therefore, they need special attention and con-

We must stay determined and try our best to reach our destination. If we quit making an effort, we will never get what we want and those who get what they want, will never stop trying for it.

Islam places great emphasis on the role of youth in shaping a prosperous future, recognising their potential for development and efficiency. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) in his wisdom, is said to have advised youngsters to make the most of their youth, health, wealth, free time, and life itself. According to a hadith, the Prophet said: "Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your riches before your poverty, your free time before your work, and your life before your death."

This guidance aligns with modern scientific understanding, which acknowledges the vitality and innovation of young minds.

The Holy Quran mentions the story of the People of the Cave (Ashab-i-kahf)—a group of devout youth who sought Allah's help at the time of difficulties. They wanted to escape religious persecution; this is an example for all youths of how to surmount difficulties in life.

The youth are facing major challenges today. They have to struggle and remain steadfast in their faith, for struggle itself is the meaning of life and there is no escape.

Valliani is an educationist with an interest in religion.

— Dawn (Pakistan)/ANN

Got a column idea? Write for us

The Kathmandu Post solicits well-researched, unapologetic opinion pieces from our readers.

Please email your pieces or pitches, a high-resolution headshot, and a one-line bio to tkpopinion@gmail.com.

Please google your pitches before writing to us. If you're submitting an article that the *Post* or other publications have already covered, tell us why your piece is important.

Make sure that your piece is original. Authors who plagiarise or get AI tools, including ChatGPT, to write their pieces are blacklisted.

The *Post* receives dozens of pitches daily from aspiring writers, students, analysts, activists, entrepreneurs and diplomats. We cannot respond to every single email, but if we like your idea, we will get back to you within a week.

— Editors

Great writers, forgotten wives

WORDS & ECHOES

Women married to writers greatly influenced their lives, yet women's sacrifices were not acknowledged.

ABHI SUBEDI



Women play important roles in the lives of their husbands. In this column, I allude to the rare tales of remarkable women who reveal some unexplored aspects of literary writers and the influence these women had in their lives. This is evident from the stories of the wives of writers like Leo Tolstoy, PB Shelley, Laxmi Prasad Devkota and others mentioned in this article. Besides the women whose interviews are available, I would like to mention the roles of three notable women: Mandakini, Balakrishna Sama's wife; Sushila Koirala, BP Koirala's wife; and Manu Kumari Thapa, Lain Singh Bangdel's wife.

Creating Sushila Koirala's character in my play *Sandajuko Mahabharat* (2015) was challenging. BP extensively mentioned her in his autobiographical writings. I briefly spoke with Sushila about Sama's play, *Ma*, which she had directed and performed in Biratnagar in 1951, for which she is called the first Nepali woman director of a play. Sama clearly mentions Mandakini and her impact on his life. Her portraits, which he executed, can be seen in his house. Poet Kedar Man Vyathit once told me the Sama couple looked like a pair of doves. I know Manu *didi*'s impact on Bangdelji very well and have also written about her.

This theme of women's contribution has struck me for a few reasons. First, I met these women through my relationship with the writers. Second, I met some of them while Bindu Subedi, the story writer and editor of the Nepali section of the English-Nepali quarterly magazine *Across*, conducted their recorded interviews. She published the interviews of the wives of eight writers and poets under a telling and critical title, "These forgotten wives—*biriseka shrimati-haru*—of the late literary writers", in two issues of the magazine. These



BP Koirala and Sushila Koirala



Manu Kumari Thapa and Lain Singh Bangdel

interviews unfold the tales of the women who played significant roles in the lives of their writer husbands.

It was a great privilege for me to attend some of these interviews. It gave me a chance to understand the power of these women and the ethics and challenges of the times they closely experienced. I was overwhelmed to hear how their influence on their husbands helped create the celebrated literary works. I especially recall meeting Mana Devi Devkota, wife of the eminent poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota, and Mishri Devi Shrestha, wife of poet Siddhicharan Shrestha. The other women interviewed in *Across* (February-April 1999) are Jyotsna Vyathit, poet Kedar Man Vyathit's wife, and the wife of writer Keshav Raj Pindali.

Ratna Lamichhane and Subarna Lamichhane, the wives of Shankar Lamichhane; Shova Aryal, wife of Bhairav Aryal; and Kanti Sherchan, wife of Bhupi Sherchan, are interviewed in another issue of the magazine (August-October 2001). Last year, I had the privilege of meeting Kantiji at the launch of the book *Bhupi: A Daughter's Memoir* by Kavita Sherchan, Bhupi's daughter. Only two remarkable women, Subarna Lamichhane and Kanti Sherchan, are alive today.

Ratna and Subarna fondly speak about Lamichhane from individual perspectives, and their interviews show compassion. Ratna was deeply familiar with Shankar's writings and his problems. Shova Aryal makes an interesting observation about her husband, Bhairav Aryal, who was famous

for satire and humour in his writings. She says, "Gautama Buddha had left home leaving his wife Yashodhara and son Rahul behind, but our humour writer chose to die by leaving six children from the age of thirteen to two and a half, and a wife in the lurch." In her interview, Kanti Sherchan praised Bhupi's humanism, his sense of freedom and dedication to his work.

These women's stories about the condition of the writers' angst, their inspirations and the times they fought with are rare studies for critics and researchers.

The interviewer, Bindu Subedi, has written the following about the qualities and the enduring passion and compassion of the wives of the writers. These women, who bore the children and brought them up, fought minuscule battles in each case, sometimes too hard. They dealt with their husbands' moods, hid their pain behind smiles, supported them through their most difficult phases of life and preserved their writings. Some of them even established awards in their husbands' names, stayed beside them when they were ill and served and helped them. However, the writers have not written much in acknowledgement of the sacrifice of their wives.

There are some exceptions, though. Siddhicharan Shrestha has written a poem about Mishrideri, and Vyathit often mentions Jyotsna's name in his poems. Lain Singh Bangdel's gratitude towards Manu is seen throughout his works. But literary critics do not mention these women's contributions in their critical writings. When they

do, they distort. The interviewer claims that this becomes clear after listening to these women.

Mana Devi Devkota, who was 87 at the time of the interview in 2001, looked bright, confident and ready to share how she had been a good companion to her husband, Laxmi Prasad Devkota. I also went to see her then; I did not talk much with her except to express my pleasure to have met her. Devkota's life was full of events and stories about writing. His lifestyle and writing habits are also interesting.

Devkota, the editor of *Yugvani*, which was supposed to be an anti-Rana publication, went to Banaras with the anti-Rana rebels, whom Mana Devi Devkota referred to as 'congress'. Mana Devi recounts a rare story to Bindu Subedi about how she went to Banaras to rescue the poet and safely brought him home. She faced several difficulties, and the 'congress party' people didn't cooperate, as they were unhappy with her for taking Devkota back home. In addition to experiencing financial challenges in bringing him back and continuing their life, she also had to face the wrath of the Rana regime.

These women have inspired their husbands at all the important moments. The structuralism of these women's help is based on the male-centric praxis. The commonality between all these women is that they helped their husbands by being with them during their difficult and happy moments. Being physically present by listening to their writings and perennially inspiring them during hard times is obviously a daunting task.

Nepal's yoga and meditation potential

The country can position itself as a global advocate for wellness through the two practices.

RAJ KUMAR BARAL



In today's world, physical and mental health have emerged as major issues. Stress, anxiety and depression have become all too common. Similarly, physical ailments such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure and weakened immune systems are on the rise.

Scientific research shows that stress negatively impacts the immune system. It makes individuals more

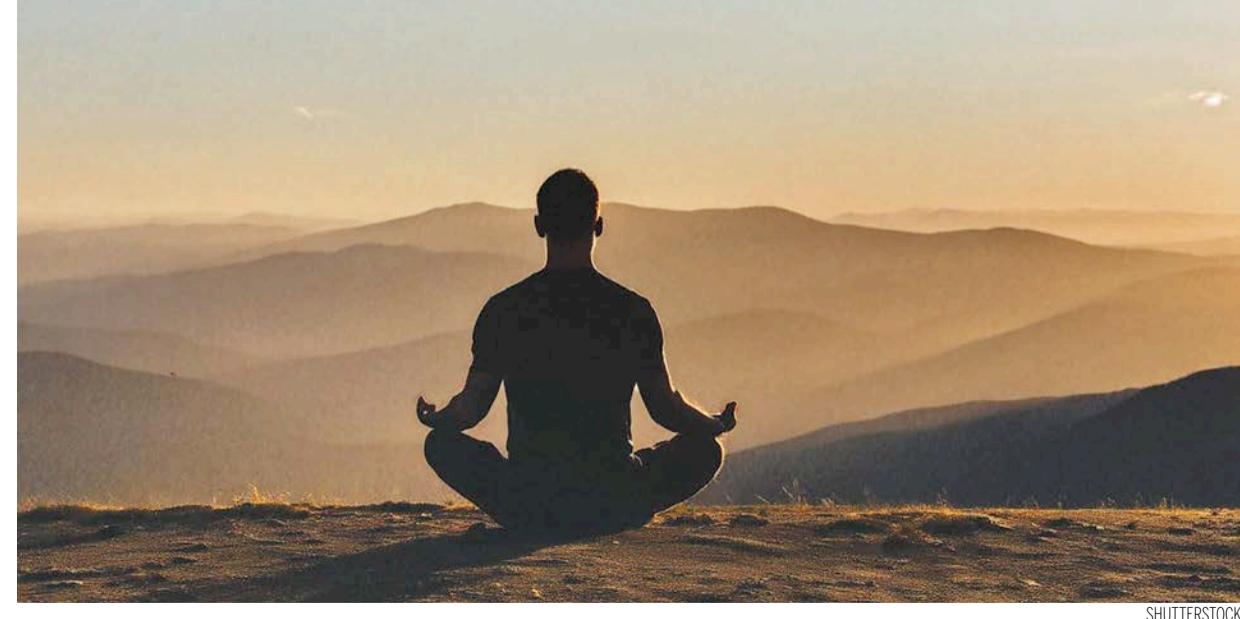
estimated 5 percent of adults worldwide suffer from depression and mental health issues, which are the primary reasons behind the global suicide rate of over 700,000 deaths each year.

In the wake of this situation, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution recognising December 21 as World Meditation Day. The day marks the importance of meditation, which has proven effective in reducing stress, promoting healing, increasing energy and thereby promoting peace and well-being in the world. This milestone was achieved through the strong advocacy of countries like Nepal, India, Liechtenstein, Sri Lanka and Mexico.

This initiative has historical significance for Nepal. Meditation dates back to the Vedic civilisation, when *rishis* (sages) practised it in the Himalayas to attain spiritual wisdom and enlightenment. Lord Shiva, often revered as the first meditator, is connected to Nepal through sacred sites like Pashupatinath Temple. Gautam

nised the significance of yoga, meditation and *swajagaran* (self-alerted awakening). It has incorporated meditation (along with yoga) into its policies and programmes for the fiscal year 2080-81, emphasising its role in key areas such as public administration, education, health, tourism and social development. The goal of this inclusion, as stated in the document, is to develop a healthy and ethical society across all three tiers of government—federal, provincial and local.

Some local governments are now implementing this vision at the grassroots by developing localised school curricula that include yoga and meditation. This initiative is promising because research conducted among the younger generation and school-goers worldwide has shown that meditation and yoga help improve their attention span and are instrumental in managing stress and emotional control. Additionally, these practices increase optimism and improve creativity and



SHUTTERSTOCK

vulnerable to diseases and contributes to other mental health problems like anxiety, depression and insomnia. Research reports also reveal that anxiety and depression significantly impair mental health by causing difficulties in work performance, affecting relationships and leading to social isolation, hopelessness and suicidal impulses. A recent World Health Organization report reveals that an

Buddha, who achieved enlightenment through deep meditation, further reinforced this connection to meditation. Moreover, meditation has remained central to the spiritual practices of Hinduism and Buddhism over the centuries, continuously shaping the country's spiritual landscape.

Current initiatives and prospects
The Government of Nepal has recog-

intelligence. Further, yoga supports physical health by improving blood flow and detoxification, while meditation helps manage pain and become mindful. These practices work together to support the mental and physical health of the younger generation.

This momentum is also reflected in Nepal's growing interest in wellness tourism. Nepal's landscapes and

spiritual heritage attract tourists who want to do yoga and meditation and experience Ayurveda and spa treatments in tranquil settings. Though few, there are hotels and resorts, Ayurveda hospitals, yoga trekking opportunities and specified places for yoga and meditation, such as yoga homes, ashrams and academies in and around Kathmandu. This trend establishes Nepal as a global hub for wellness tourism.

Nepal can unlock greater promises in the future by integrating meditation, yoga and *swajagaran* campaigns in various areas of society. Notably, these efforts also align with Sustainable Development Goal 3, which aims to ensure "good health and well-being."

Similarly, incorporating these practices into an ethical society can bring long-term benefits. Extending these practices into politics, administration and the private sector will also promote a mindful and ethically responsible society.

Finally, integrating these practices can preserve Nepal's cultural heritage and address modern-day challenges. Nepal can strengthen international relations, improve public health, address sustainability efforts, promote tourism and help achieve global peace by positioning itself as a global advocate for wellness through yoga and meditation.

Way forward
Strong coordination between the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, media and Non-Resident Nepalis is very important to strengthen Nepal's position as a global destination for wellness tourism. Nepal can attract more tourists seeking spiritual growth and wellness by spreading messages internationally.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, in consultation with its stakeholders, can be central in integrating yoga, meditation and *swajagaran* into school and university programmes. Academic institutions should now take the lead in teaching the art of staying alert by equipping learners with the skills to reflect inward and turn to themselves for clarity and balance. Such integration develops self-awareness and emotional resilience among learners and prepares them for personal and societal challenges.

Baral is pursuing PhD in Rhetoric and Writing Studies from the University of Texas at El Paso, the US.

WORLD

Death toll in attack on Christmas market in Germany rises to 5, more than 200 injured

Friday's attack came eight years after an Islamic extremist drove a truck into a crowded Christmas market in Berlin.



Security guards stand in front of a cordoned-off Christmas Market after a car crashed into a crowd, in Magdeburg, Germany, on Saturday.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAGDEBURG, DEC 21

Germans on Saturday mourned both the victims and their shaken sense of security after a Saudi doctor intentionally drove into a Christmas market teeming with holiday shoppers, killing at least five people, including a small child, and wounding at least 200 others.

Authorities arrested a 50-year-old man at the site of the attack in Magdeburg on Friday evening and took him into custody for questioning. He has lived in Germany since 2006, practicing medicine in Bernburg, about 40 kilometres south of Magdeburg, officials said.

The state governor, Reiner Haseloff, told reporters that the death toll rose to five from a previous figure of two and that more than 200 people in total were injured. Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that nearly 40 of them "are so seriously injured that we must be very worried about them."

Several German media outlets identified the suspect as Taleb A., withholding his last name in line with privacy laws, and reported that he was a specialist in psychiatry and psychotherapy. Mourners lit candles and placed flowers outside a church near the market on the cold and gloomy day. Several people stopped and cried.

A Berlin church choir whose members witnessed a previous Christmas market attack in 2016 sang Amazing Grace, a hymn about God's mercy, offering their prayers and solidarity with the victims.

The man behind the attack

There were still no answers on Saturday as to what motivated the man to drive his black BMW into a crowd in the eastern German city.

Describing himself as a former Muslim, the suspect shared dozens of tweets and retweets daily focusing on anti-Islam themes, criticising the religion and congratulating Muslims who left the faith. He also accused German

authorities of failing to do enough to combat what he said was the "Islamism of Europe." Some described him as an activist who helped Saudi women flee their homeland. He has also voiced support for the far-right and anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

Haseloff said on Friday that authorities believed the man acted alone.

Magdeburg is still shaken

The violence shocked Germany and the city, bringing its mayor to the verge of tears and marrying a festive event that's part of a centuries-old German tradition. It prompted several other German towns to cancel their weekend Christmas markets as a precaution and out of solidarity with Magdeburg's loss. Berlin kept its markets open but has increased its police presence at them.

Germany has suffered a string of extremist attacks in recent years, including a knife attack that killed three people and wounded eight at a

festival in the western city of Solingen in August.

Magdeburg is a city of about 240,000 people, west of Berlin, that serves as Saxony-Anhalt's capital. Friday's attack came eight years after an Islamic extremist drove a truck into a crowded Christmas market in Berlin, killing 13 people and injuring many others. The attacker was killed days later in a shootout in Italy.

Chancellor Scholz and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser traveled to Magdeburg on Saturday, and a memorial service is to take place in the city cathedral in the evening. Faeser ordered flags lowered to half-staff at federal buildings across the country.

A recount of the horrifying attack

Verified bystander footage distributed by the German news agency dpa showed the suspect's arrest at a tram stop in the middle of the road. A nearby police officer pointing a handgun at the man shouted at him as he lay prone, his head arched up slightly. Other officers swarmed around the suspect and took him into custody.

Thi Linh Chi Nguyen, a 34-year-old manicurist from Vietnam whose salon is located in a mall across from the Christmas market, was on the phone during a break when she heard loud bangs and thought at first they were fireworks. She then saw a car drive through the market at high speed. People screamed and a child was thrown into the air by the car.

Shaking as she described the horror of what she witnessed, she recalled seeing the car bursting out of the market and turning right onto Ernst-Reuter-Allee street and then coming to a standstill at the tram stop where the suspect was arrested. The number of injured people was overwhelming.

"My husband and I helped them for two hours. He ran back home and grabbed as many blankets as he could find because they didn't have enough to cover the injured people. And it was so cold," she said.

The market itself was still cordoned off on Saturday with red-and-white tape and police vans every 50 metres. Police with machine pistols guarded every entry to the market. Some thermal security blankets still lay on the street. Christmas markets are a German holiday tradition cherished since the Middle Ages, now successfully exported to much of the Western world.

Drone attack hits Russian city 1,000 km from Ukraine frontier

● AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW, DEC 21

Kyiv on Saturday staged a major drone attack on the Russian city of Kazan, 1,000 kilometres from the frontier, as Moscow's troops captured a new frontline village in eastern Ukraine.

The drones damaged buildings in Kazan, capital of the Tatarstan republic, with a population of more than 1.3 million, but there were no victims, local officials said.

Kazan City hall said some fires had started and were being tackled by the fire brigade. The city's airport was temporarily closed, the Russian civilian aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said. Some residents were evacuated, but authorities did not give figures. Authorities said that all major public events in Tatarstan had been cancelled as a precaution.

Videos on Russian social media networks showed drones hitting high rise buildings setting off fireballs.

AFP could not immediately verify the authenticity of the images.

Ukraine, which has staged regular attacks on targets inside Russia since the start of full scale military offensive in February 22, did not immediately comment.

"Today Kazan suffered a massive drone attack," Rustam Minnikhanov, the Tatarstan republic leader, said in a post on Telegram. "While before industrial enterprises were attacked, now the enemy attacks civilians in the morning," he added.

Minnikhanov's press service said at least eight drones had been detected.

Russia's defence ministry accused Ukraine of targeting "civilian infrastructure" in Kazan. It said six drones had been neutralised or destroyed but did not say how many had been involved.

The ministry said the Russian army had captured a new village near the key city of Kurakhove in eastern Ukraine where Russian forces have made major advances in recent months.

Russian troops had "liberated" the village of Kostiantynopolske, just eight kilometers from Kurakhove, an industrial town that is a looming Russian target, a statement said.

Russia on Friday staged strikes on the Ukraine capital, Kyiv, that left one dead and 13 wounded, according to the city's authorities.



In this photo released on Saturday by the Kazan City Hall, officials look at a damage site at the residential complex in Kazan, Russia, following Ukrainian drone attacks.

Another five people were killed in a Ukrainian attack on the Russian frontier region of Kursk, the local governor said.

Russia's security service said meanwhile that a man had been sentenced to 19 years in jail for sending information to US intelligence services about the Russian military.

The unidentified man, who was born in 1993, was found guilty of "high treason" and other charges, the FSB agency said. The inquiry "confirmed that he had established a confidential cooperation relationship with representatives of the US intelligence services," the agency said.

The man was accused of sending information about the identity and other personal details of Russian soldiers.

He was arrested in January 2023. A regional court at Orenburg in the Urals ordered the jail term and sent the man to a "strict regime" penal colony, the FSB said.

It released images of the man surrounded by agents and in court.

Russian courts have ordered multiple heavy jail terms for treason, terrorism and sabotage since the start of the military offensive.

Asylum granted to Polish ex-minister won't be 'last': Orbán

● AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BUDAPEST, DEC 21

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Saturday that the asylum granted to a Polish ex-government official facing corruption charges—which Warsaw considered a "hostile act"—won't be the last one".

Poland summoned Hungary's ambassador and recalled its own envoy from its fellow EU member state and NATO ally after Budapest announced it gave refugee status to former Polish deputy minister Marcin Romanowski.

"I am not telling you a big secret when I say that I do not think it will be the last one," Orbán told journalists at his annual end-of-the-year presser.

The nationalist leader also stressed that he wants to keep the "conflicts with Poland at a manageable level", and therefore won't comment on the country's rule-of-law situation.

But he added that Hungary had prepared a "massive, thorough study" on the issue, and the government had based its asylum decision on that.

Romanowski, a lawmaker from the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party and former deputy justice minister, is accused of 11 different offences by Polish prosecutors.

Orban is a close ally of the PiS party, which was ousted from power by a pro-EU coalition led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk following last year's elections.

Charges against Romanowski include participation in an organised crime group and attempted embezzlement of funds totalling almost 40 million euros (\$42 million) from a fund for crime victims, which he supervised.

Romanowski had been arrested in Poland, but his detention was later deemed illegal by Polish courts because he had parliamentary immunity as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

He disappeared in early December after PACE revoked his immunity and a court ordered his arrest.

Hungary had granted him asylum, claiming his "legal case is not guaranteed to be dealt with impartially and free from political influence in their home country beyond a reasonable doubt."

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski called Budapest's decision to grant asylum a "hostile act".



French President Emmanuel Macron is welcomed at the Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, in Addis Ababa on Saturday as part of a two-day visit to Djibouti and Ethiopia.

Macron stresses Djibouti base as France loses Africa footholds

● AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

DJIBOUTI, DEC 21

President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday stressed the importance of France's military base in Djibouti as his country loses strategic footholds in Africa.

Macron paid a brief visit to the Horn of Africa state for talks with its President Ismail Omar Guelleh and to see French troops ahead of the end-of-year holidays.

A number of African countries have recently ended military accords with France and ordered out its troops. Macron said during talks with Guelleh that the French presence in Djibouti was key for the security of the Indo-Pacific trade routes between Europe and Asia.

"This presence in Djibouti is of course also oriented towards the Indian Ocean, the Indo-Pacific," Macron said.

He added that France's Indo-Pacific strategy "could not work without the French forces in Djibouti".

Macron told French troops on Friday that the base could take on a greater importance as it could be "reinvented" to become a launch point for missions in Africa.

Accords for the building of a new airport and the development of a space agency were signed on Saturday.

The two leaders also discussed regional problems, including the war in Sudan.

"In several countries, we had historically established bases. We have wanted to rethink that model," he said in the latest comments.

But he insisted that Djibouti was not part of these plans "as for decades the nature of our base here, our operations, is profoundly different".

Djibouti looks out onto a vast zone in the Indian Ocean—a region that includes India and China as well as sea routes that account for a huge proportion of world trade.

French troops left Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in 2022 and 2023 after the military junta that took power in those countries broke defence accords with the former colonial power.

It has started withdrawing jets and troops from Chad in recent weeks after the country's military leader cut military ties. Senegal made a similar request in November.

The Djibouti president highlighted his small country's "privileged relations" with France. A defence accord was renewed in July.

Accords for the building of a new airport and the development of a space agency were signed on Saturday.

The two leaders also discussed regional problems, including the war in Sudan.

During the May 2023 unrest in Sudan "witnessed tragic incidents

Pakistan military courts convict 25 of pro-Imran Khan unrest

● AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ISLAMABAD, DEC 21

Pakistan military courts have convicted and sentenced 25 people for involvement in pro-Imran Khan unrest last year, the armed forces said on Saturday, with the majority handed decade-long prison terms.

Ex-prime minister Khan was arrested in May last year after being ousted from office and mounting an unprecedented campaign of defiance against the nation's powerful military leaders.

His detention over graft allegations sparked nationwide unrest, some targeting armed forces installations, and prompting rare prosecutions of civilians in military courts.

Amnesty International called the move "an intimidation tactic, designed to crack down on dissent" and said it was "contrary to international law".

The verdicts come three weeks after the capital Islamabad was gripped by fresh unrest.

Military courts are largely opaque, but after months of confidentiality the military public relations wing named 25 people who have been prosecuted.

All of the convicted are men and 14 have been sentenced to a decade of "rigorous imprisonment", the military said with the remaining 11 set to serve lesser prison terms.

"All sentences announced by the military courts are disproportionate and excessive," said a spokesman for Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. "These sentences are rejected."

The verdicts were announced just three weeks after the capital Islamabad was gripped by fresh unrest, as tens of thousands of Khan supporters flooded in to demand his release.

The government said at least five security personnel were killed whilst PTI alleged at least 10 of their own were shot dead by security forces before crowds retreated. A military statement did not make clear what crime each person had been convicted of or when, listing only the location of their offence. The shortest sentence meted out was two years.

During the May 2023 unrest in Sudan "witnessed tragic incidents

of politically provoked violence and arson at multiple places," the military statement said.

"These blatant acts of violence not only shocked the nation but also underscored necessity of checking this unacceptable attempt of political terrorism." Former cricket star Khan served as prime minister from 2018 to 2022, when he was ousted by parliament in a no-confidence vote.

He blamed the then-head of the powerful military establishment for his downfall. Pakistan's generals are considered the country's political kingmakers and have directly ruled the nation for decades at a time.

Khan's May 2023 detention lasted a

2021 return to power in Afghanistan.

Last year saw casualties hit a six-year high, with more than 1,500 civilians, security forces and militants killed, according to the Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies.

Saturday's attack was "the most dangerous assault in this region this year" according to the first intelligence official. Islamabad accuses Kabul's rulers of failing to root out militants staging attacks on Pakistan from over the border.

The Pakistani Taliban—known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—share a common ideology with their Afghan counterparts who surged back to power three years ago.

Kabul's new rulers have pledged to evict foreign militant groups from Afghan soil. But a UN Security Council report in July estimated up to 6,500 TTP fighters are based there—and said "the Taliban do not conceive of TTP as a terrorist group".

The report said the Afghan Taliban show "ad hoc support to, and tolerance of, TTP operations, including the supplying of weapons and permission for training".

The spike in attacks has soured Islamabad-Kabul relations. Security was cited as one reason for Pakistan's campaign last year to evict hundreds of thousands of undocumented Afghan migrants. (AFP)

matter of days but he was re-arrested three months later and has remained imprisoned since, facing a parade of court cases he claims are politically motivated.

Meanwhile, PTI was targeted by a sweeping crackdown following the unrest, with thousands of grassroots supporters and senior officials arrested. The 72-year-old was barred from running in February elections, which were marred by rigging allegations.

PTI defied the crackdown to win more seats than any other party, but a coalition of parties considered more pliable to military influence formed a government and shut them out of power.

Aston Villa beat Man City to deepen Guardiola's pain

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND, DEC 21

Aston Villa beat crisis-hit Manchester City 2-1 on Saturday to heap more misery on floundering manager Pep Guardiola, who has now suffered nine defeats in his past 12 matches.

Jhon Duran finished off a fine team move to give the home side an early lead and Morgan Rogers doubled Villa's advantage in the 65th minute.

Phil Foden scored his first Premier League goal of the season in stoppage time but it proved to be too little too late.



AP/RSS

Pep Guardiola

Pep Guardiola, in the worst run of his glittering career, said Friday that "sooner or later" things will turn around but City's fear factor has vanished.

Guardiola made six changes to the team side that lost last week's Manchester derby, bringing in goalkeeper Stefan Ortega and reshaping his defence with Rico Lewis, John Stones and Manuel Akanji.

Mateo Kovacic and Jack Grealish also returned.

But the defending champions started the match in chaotic fashion and could have been behind inside 20 seconds.

Untidy work from Josko Gvardiol allowed John McGinn to steal the ball and he fed Duran, whose shot from outside the box was pushed behind by Ortega.

Villa were millimetres away from taking the lead from the resulting corner, with Ortega, in for first-choice goalkeeper Ederson, producing a superb save to deny Pau Torre.

City then settled and their possession numbers topped 75 percent but they created little.

Instead it was Villa who took the lead through Duran after a superb team move, scoring his seventh Premier League goal of the season.

Youri Tielemans delivered a wonderful defence-splitting pass to Rogers, who burst through City's backline with ease before finding Duran on his right and the Colombian international finished crisply.

Phil Foden tested Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez in the 35th minute after an incisive move involving Lewis.

And Gvardiol squandered a glorious chance moments before half-time, heading over a Grealish cross. Guardiola brought on Kyle Walker for Stones at the break.

Minutes into the second half Villa's Matty Cash lashed an attempt into the side netting after a speedy attack before Duran had a strike ruled out for offside.

Rogers hit the foot of the post just before the hour mark after an intricate team move down the left.

Emery's men doubled their lead 20 minutes into the second half, with Rogers finishing unerringly from a McGinn pass. City created little as they searched for a way back into the game until Foden pounced for a late consolation goal.

Janakpur clinch Nepal Premier League title

>> Continued from page 1

"Credit goes to the team members," Aasif said after the victory. "We saw the wicket and I thought it was going to be a high-scoring match... And anything below 180 would be a good score to chase. We were confident enough that we could chase down the target..."

NEPAL PREMIER LEAGUE

FINAL

TU CRICKET GROUND, KIRTIKUR

TOSS: Sudurpaschim Royals, bat first.

Sudurpaschim 184-9 (20/20 overs)

Saif Zaib 69 (43), Binod Bhandari 41 (31);

Kishore Mahato 3-0-25-3

Janakpur Bolts 185-5 (19.2/20 overs)

Lahiru Milantha 87 (49), Aasif Sheikh

33 (19), Harsh Thaker 30* (24);

Ishan Pandey 2-0-19-1

Janakpur Bolts win by five wickets.

Player of the match: Lahiru Milantha

Great to see the top order stepping up today and finishing off in style."

The victory also helped Janakpur exact a sweet revenge for their earlier defeats to Sudurpaschim in the group stage and Qualifier 1.

Champions Janakpur won a purse of Rs11 million, while runners-up Sudurpaschim pocketed Rs5.1 million.

Karnali Yaks and Chitwan Rhinos, finishing third and fourth respectively, won Rs2.5 million and Rs1.5 million, respectively.

Sudurpaschim skipper Airee was named the Electric Player of the Tournament, earning him an Omoda car worth Rs6.2 million. Airee scored 227 runs, took eight wickets, held three catches and affected seven run-outs in the tournament. "This tourna-



POST PHOTOS: HEMANTA SHRESTHA

Players of Janakpur Bolts celebrate after defeating Sudurpaschim Royals in the final of the Nepal Premier League T20 cricket tournament at the TU Cricket Ground in Kirtipur on Saturday. (Below) Janakpur's Lahiru Milantha reacts.

ment was good overall," Airee said. "I would like to thank all our supporters for making the NPL a success."

On the defeat, Airee said: "Everyone played well. Our team played well. Janakpur's Milantha and Aasif were good. Our bowling did not go as expected... We could not win but will do it next time."

Zaib, who scored 275 runs and 12 wickets, was named the player of the tournament.

"We were looking for anything past

150 but we got quite a good start," Zaib said. "We were hoping we had given enough. But Lahiru played an unbelievable innings... Credit to the Bolts."

Janakpur's Lalit Rajbanshi won the best bowler award for taking 17 wickets. He won an Ultraviolet bike.

James Neesham was declared the energetic player of the tournament and Karnali Yaks' Bipin Sharma was adjudged an emerging player.

Lumbini Lions won the fair play award.



Position/Award

Winners	Team/Player	Prize
Runners-up	Janakpur Bolts	Rs1.10 million
Third place	Sudurpaschim Royals	Rs 5.1million
Fourth place	Karnali Yaks	Rs 2.5million
Player of the Match (Final)	Chitwan Rhinos	Rs 1.5million
Siddhartha Bank Player of the Tournament	Lahiru Milantha (Janakpur)	Rs50,000
Electric Player of the Tournament	Saif Zaib (Sudurpaschim)	Rs500,000
Red Bull Energetic Player of the Tournament	Dipendra Singh Airee (Sudurpaschim)	Ormoda Car
Ballistic Bowler of the Tournament	James Neesham (Janakpur)	Rs200,000
Emerging Player of the Tournament	Lalit Rajbanshi	Ultraviolet Bike
Nepal Premier League Fair Play Award	Bipin Sharma (Karnali)	Rs 50,000 and scholarship worth Rs1million
Ncell Max 4s of the Tournament	Lumbini Lions	-
	Lahiru Milantha (Janakpur)	Rs200,000



HOROSCOPE

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Plans may go awry this morning; stay patient. Focus on love and connection to smoothen things. Don't rush long-term decisions; follow what excites you.



TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Reconnect with your core values and personal goals, especially if social influences have recently confused you. Use the afternoon to get ahead on chores and tasks. Recharge at home tonight for clarity and balance.



GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Winter inspires hibernation with loved ones, balancing bonding and personal growth. Stay home to recharge and enjoy comfort and luxury. Revisiting old memories could bring delightful surprises.



CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Winter is the most romantic season for singles and couples alike. Establishing healthy boundaries and ground rules within your closest relationships. Express your feelings and enjoy support from loved ones.



LEO (July 23-August 22)

You may require some extra time waking up this morning. Rather than pushing your mind, focus on your surroundings. By afternoon, unleash your social butterfly. Prep for Monday while catching up on errands.



VIRGO (August 23-September 22)

Dreamy vibes will inspire you to linger under the covers, granting permission to prioritise softness over tasks. Luxurious vibes continue to flow, so stay mindful of spending while out with friends today.



LIBRA (September 23-October 22)

Your morning dreams may reveal hidden truths, so reflect deeply. Essential conversations this afternoon improved friendships. Take time to relax and enjoy screen time tonight.



SCORPIO (October 23-November 21)

Throw out what you don't need and hold joy close to your heart this morning. The atmosphere shifts this afternoon, putting you in the mood for silence and the comforts of home. Restructure your routines.



SAGITTARIUS (November 22-December 21)

Don't let worries about Monday ruin your Sunday. Explore your community or enjoy local events for positivity. Tap into love and joy to end the day uplifted.



CAPRICORN (December 22-January 19)

Start the day with softness, embracing joy and spirituality. Plan for the week ahead to feel stable and in control. Take time this evening to recharge and revisit goals.



AQUARIUS (January 20-February 18)

Lethargy vibes flow this morning and fade by afternoon, bringing a burst of energy. Focus on mindfulness and self-love practices for clarity. Share your thoughts with someone if you need support.



PISCES (February 19-March 20)

Morning invites solitude or time with authentic connections. Let go of baggage and focus on self-improvement today. Disconnect from devices and organise for the week ahead.

ASTROLOGY.COM

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Hit hard
- 5 Parts of plants
- 10 Calendar abbr.
- 13 Stew pot
- 14 Kind of magical card
- 15 Perjurer
- 16 "Believe — not!"
- 17 Weight unit
- 18 "— of Green Gables"
- 19 Inside info
- 21 Grasshopper
- 23 Emcee
- 24 — and pop store
- 25 Actress Cameron —
- 27 Immerse
- 32 Placard
- 34 Quid — quo
- 35 Standard
- 36 Old English length
- 37 Place of contest
- 39 Shadowy
- 40 Experts
- 42 Wallet item
- 43 At the right moment
- 46 Limit
- 48 Trick
- 49 — de Janeiro
- 50 Hit on the head
- 52 Speaks ill of
- 56 Assaults
- 60 For each (2 wds.)
- 61 Inundated
- 63 Mystical letter
- 64 Solar plexus
- 65 Coffee beverage
- 66 Brag
- 67 Letter for plurals
- 68 Stage direction
- 69 Chops down
- 70 Seethe
- 71 Singing voice
- 72 Decelerate
- 73 Headgear for construction workers (2 wds.)
- 75 Packs
- 76 Tease
- 77 Eagle (Var.)
- 78 Not genuine
- 79 Old watercraft
- 80 Come upon
- 81 Indian princess
- 82 Angered
- 83 Nonprofessionals
- 84 Flow slowly
- 85 Welsh Singer — Jones
- 86 "La — Vita"
- 87 British —
- 88 — first you don't succeed
- 89 ...

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

LO BOS	CL AD	T A P
OK API	HA LE	BENE
AL LOT	IS IS	LATS
FAI RER	SCEN ARI	O
EM IER	ER OS	
BI AS	DAD TATAMI	
AND	GN AT HERON	
SAUL	E GRET DIRK	
IN LAW	ETNA SSE	
NET TED	SET SEED	
TEAS TEMP		
AB RIDGE D RAISIN		
LA IC GLUM T ROVE		
ANTE EM MA TIRES		
SEE RAPT TEST		

12-30-24 © 2024 UFS, Dist. by Andrews McMeel for UFS

DOWN

- 45 Crowned head
- 47 Fix fraudulently
- 50 Moisten with drippings
- 51 Old anesthetic award
- 52 Female animal
- 53 Siamese
- 54 Oodles
- 55 Graceful bird
- 57 Remedy
- 58 Be cognizant of
- 59 Stitches
- 6

